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ABSTRACT

Public concern about the quality of leadership in society and the quality of education have fueled the demand for educational reform, particularly in secondary schools. This paper presents preliminary findings of doctoral research that investigated how leadership is experienced and understood by students, parents, teachers, and administrators in one secondary school community. The site was a small rural school that had been selected for study in the Canadian Education Association's exemplary schools program. Data were gathered through observation, interviews with 19 participants, and document analysis. The findings emphasize a conceptualization of the leadership phenomenon that transcends individuals, roles, and behaviors. Anyone in the educational community can engage in leadership actions. Leadership in the case study was presented as the enabling activities that occur within the context of trusting relationships between and among students and staff members who are focused on individual learning, achievement, and success. (Contains 34 references.) (LMI)

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LEADERSHIP IN A SELECTED EXEMPLARY SECONDARY SCHOOL COMMUNITY

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Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association

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Introduction

The perception that there is a "leadership crisis" (Bennis & Nanus, 1985) within society in general, coupled with the impression that "things are not right at school" (Barlow & Robertson, 1994, p. 1) have given rise to the current call for educational reform. Government plans for the restructuring of public education are bureaucratic attempts to deal with public perceptions and restore confidence in educational leadership. Aware of the prevalent belief that educational reform is the necessary prerequisite for social reform, and the "eternal optimism that reforms in schools will right many of society's ills" (Wilson & Corcoran, 1988, p. 1), governments in the Western world are responding to social, economic and political challenges of an evolving post-industrial society (Elkind, 1995; Rost, 1991) by "mandating excellence" in schools (Wilson and Rossman, 1993, p. x). In the present as in the past, the secondary school is often the focus of public criticism and government reform initiatives (Hampel, 1986; Sizer, 1992).

Within the research community a body of exemplary secondary school literature has emerged as a response to the present historical context. Evidence from the investigation of secondary schools with a reputation for success is informing the on-going educational dialogue among practitioners, researchers, and policy-makers. The dichotomy between sociological and anthropological perspectives within this emergent field (Lee, Bryk & Smith, 1993), however, has contributed to the situation where research findings tend to focus on either the bureaucratic organization, or the cultural characteristics of exemplary secondary schools. Leadership and the issues surrounding leadership, as a result, have not been fully or directly addressed. Clear linkages between research-based models of leadership and effective school organization are as elusive in the exemplary secondary school research as they are in the larger domain of organizational theory (Gronn & Ribbins, 1996; Immegart, 1988; Rossman, Corbett, & Firestone, 1988; Wilson & Corcoran, 1988; Sergiovanni, 1995), indicating the need for further inquiry and the development of new perspectives.

For my doctoral research, through a collective case study approach (Stake, 1995), I am investigating how leadership is experienced and understood by students, parents, teachers, and administrators in two secondary school communities that were among those selected for study in the Canadian Education Association's exemplary schools project (Gaskell, 1995). As my doctoral research is on-going, methods, data analysis, and preliminary findings from one of the selected school sites where study has been completed will be presented in this paper. In order to contextualize and provide a conceptual framework for the discussion, this paper begins with an overview of the relevant literature on school reform, exemplary secondary school research, leadership, and organization. To

the extent possible, this paper suggests possible linkages between leadership and effective high school organization; however its main purpose is to present initial findings from my study of the leadership phenomenon in one secondary school community with the reputation for success.

Conceptual Framework

The study of educational leadership shares research traditions, theories, and issues with organizational leadership, and for this reason an understanding of the literature on leadership is crucial in a scholarly study of school administration. The "leadership gap" (Zaleznik, 1989) and the "leadership crisis" (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Burns, 1978) are terms which have entered our contemporary language and are indicative of the widespread loss of confidence in leadership; they explain in part the current call for organizational restructuring. This loss of confidence must be understood within the context of several critical issues identified in the research literature.

Most significant are the multiple definitions of leadership which have led to ambiguity and confusion surrounding the notion itself. Factors underlying this ambiguity include the confusion between leadership and management, an elusive understanding of the nature of relationships and influence within organizations, and a lack of consensus about the specific variables which constitute leadership. These ambiguities underpin the proliferation of leadership studies which have given rise to theories and taxonomies which do not endure but which continue to be researched, continue to compete, and continue to inform practice even after they have been proven deficient. The inability of the research community to further the understanding of the interplay among all variables of the leadership phenomenon has led to the atheoretical and aconceptual nature of much leadership study to date (Immegart, 1988). This ambiguity is further complicated by the globalization of economies and the pervasive societal changes that have created an environment in which theorists and critics are questioning orthodox assumptions about organizational structures and processes. These factors have contributed to the tendency in both research and practice to reduce "leadership to good management" (Rost, 1991, p. 180).

Leadership During The Current Era Of School Reform

The assumptions and beliefs underpinning the "leadership crisis" have fueled the agenda for educational reform. The First Wave of Reform of the 1980s, and the Second Wave of Reform that is now in progress in the 1990s are indicative of the perception that school leadership is not providing "good management." There is a breakdown of "trust between those who provide the education service and those who use it" (Lewington & Orpwood, 1993, p. 163). Within schools this loss of trust coupled with the competing notions of leadership, the shift in societal values, and the preoccupation with economy and

accountability, are having a significant impact on the evolution of schooling. Sizer (1992) in the introduction to the third edition of *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School*, contended rather prophetically that "we pick on the schools when we're unhappy with ourselves" (p. 1). Sizer and others have argued that underlying the current criticism of public education is not only dissatisfaction with the state and well-being of society, but also the belief that educational reform is a necessary prerequisite to social reform (Sizer, 1992; Wilson & Rossman, 1993). Current criticism of public education, therefore, is an indicator of the escalating fear that the education system which has traditionally provided leadership during times of social upheaval can no longer continue to lead in social reform without first undergoing a major restructuring. From this perspective, the number of reform initiatives in recent years which have been focused specifically on the secondary school are politically driven attempts to support the development of young citizens who are "capable of proactively dealing with change throughout life, in a context of dynamic, multicultural global transformation" (Fullan, 1993, p. 4), and who are capable as adults of confronting "the ills of society" (Wilson & Rossman, 1993, p. 1).

Exemplary Secondary School Research

Particularly significant during the current era of reform is the tendency for researchers and critics to seek out, identify, and describe the characteristics and practices of secondary schools with a reputation for success. There is a growing body of literature which examines the health and not the pathology of secondary education (Gaskell, 1995, p. 14). By focusing on what is "good," "effective," and "successful" in selected secondary schools, this research is informing the dialogue on reform by providing models which are not "perfect," but which are "exemplary" (Gaskell, 1995; Lightfoot, 1983; Wilson & Corcoran, 1988). Within the exemplary secondary school research there are two issues which are relevant and provide a context for the present study (Foster, in press). The first issue arises from the ways in which researchers have conceptualized and studied the organization of exemplary secondary schools. The tendency among researchers to treat leadership and culture as distinct structures within the formal school organization gives rise to the second issue.

Secondary School Organization As "Community-like"

In their extensive review of the literature on the organization of effective secondary schools, Lee, Bryk and Smith (1993) found that the authors of the studies tended to view schools as either "formal organizations" with structures, roles and rules [sociological perspective], or "cultural sites" with a focus on relationships and norms for cultural membership [anthropological or ethnographic perspective]. This dichotomy within the research is

prevalent but problematic, and explains in part the apparent contradictions and tensions in the analyses of organization and leadership in the studies on exemplary secondary schools.

In Lightfoot's landmark cultural portrait of the *Good High School* (1983), for example, she concluded that "goodness was a holistic dimension [which] requires an embeddedness in the context" (p. 24). Her finding that all of the schools in her study had "a sustained and visible ideological stance" (p. 26) appeared to describe the culture of the school, yet her claim that "those most responsible for defining the school's vision and ideological stance were the principals and headmasters" (p. 323) highlighted the importance attributed to hierarchical roles within the formal structure of these schools. Lightfoot also found that each school exhibited a sense of community which had developed out of the adult and adolescent "need to feel a part of a larger network of relationships," out of wanting to "feel identified and protected by a caring institution." This description of the school in cultural terms stands in sharp contrast to her conclusion that "a good school community is defined by clear authority and a vivid ideological stance" developed by the principal (p. 346).

In the Canadian Education Association's study of exemplary secondary schools (Gaskell, 1995), researchers observed "three major tensions" underpinning the organization of all 21 secondary schools studied:

> 1) between social and academic goals and functions; 2) between responding to individual and group differences and providing a sense of community and equality of opportunity for all; 3) between professional autonomy and social accountability. (p. x)

Interpreted within the framework of Lee, Bryk and Smith's (1993) findings from their review of the literature, these tensions appear to exist between the "formal" and "cultural" dimensions of the secondary schools. There is a need to consider a conceptualization of secondary school organization that integrates both sociological and anthropological perspectives.

As part of the framework for my doctoral study, I adopted a conceptualization of secondary schools as "community-like" organizations characterized by the constantly emerging blend of formal and cultural features. School organizations conceptualized as communities constitutes a theme in the current literature on educational administration (Barth, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1994; Lambert et al., 1995; Starratt, 1996), and is also a theme which is present in the exemplary secondary school research. When schools are conceptualized as communities they become "the given ground for our collective activities," or "the quality of relationships that we share in a group," or "something that we attempt to perform everyday the way John Dewey spoke of democracy, as something we progressively achieve but whose possibilities we never fully realize" (Starratt, 1996, p. 89).

The authors (Gaskell, 1995; Lightfoot, 1983; Wilson & Corcoran, 1988) of the studies on exemplary secondary schools reviewed in preparation for this doctoral study (Foster, in press) all highlighted the importance of the network of relationships among adults and adolescents in creating the positive environments within the schools. In two out of three of the studies, the authors (Gaskell, 1983; Lightfoot, 1988) used the term "sense of community" to describe this network. In the third study (Wilson & Corcoran, 1988), "a sense of cohesion" (p. 22) was used to describe the positive school environment. By linking relationships to a "sense of community," " social cohesion," and reputation for success, these studies support the conceptualization of secondary schools as "community-like" organizations characterized by a dynamic blend of "formal " and "cultural" features.

Leadership In Community

There is also the tendency within the exemplary secondary school research to treat leadership and culture as distinct constructs within the formal school organization. Arguably, this is logical in the studies which adopt a sociological perspective, but this tendency is also apparent in the studies undertaken from an anthropological perspective. Lightfoot (1983), for example, in her cultural inquiry made the claim that part of the "goodness" of the schools of her study was a "redefinition of leadership" which she explained as "an abandoning of anachronistic caricatures" of the high school principal (p. 333). By focusing her discussion of leadership on the traits and styles of the six male principals of her study, Lightfoot's work illustrated the ambiguities and confusion characteristic of much leadership study in general, and the tendency to depict "leadership as good management" (Rost, 1991).

Wilson and Corcoran (1988) in their study of *Successful Secondary Schools* presented a more encompassing perspective of leadership which they discussed in terms of its bureaucratic and cultural linkages within the organization (p. 79). Their conceptualization was supported by findings that leadership was "dispersed" throughout the organization; that the "leaders change with the issue"; that "no one style offers a solution"; no "single individual provides the answers" (p. 83). Although these researchers focused on leadership roles within the formal social structure of the secondary schools studied, their conclusion that leadership was an organizational quality dispersed and constantly changing with the evolving "character of the school community" (p. 83) draws attention to the strong linkages between culture and leadership within the "dynamic environments" (p. 83) of the 571 successful schools of their study.

Leadership study in the exemplary secondary school research appears to be in the same state of ferment and confusion (Gronn & Ribbons, 1996) as leadership study in the larger field of organizational theory. Wilson and Corcoran's (1988) claim that "more needs

to be known about what type of leadership can create the conditions described by the successful schools literature and under what conditions" (p. 13), as well as Gaskell's (1995) call for more inquiry and discussion around the "exercise of power" (p. 281), indicate the need for new perspectives on leadership. Implicit in Wilson and Corcoran's (1988), and Gaskell's claims is the need to give greater consideration to school culture when developing these new perspectives on leadership.

Given the multiple definitions of leadership within the literature, to arrive at an operational definition for the purpose of my doctoral study necessarily involved a discussion of the central issues underpinning the definitional diversity; namely "who provides leadership," and for what purpose (Wilson & Corcoran, 1988, p. 80). In brief, the conceptual framework for the investigation of leadership in the present study (Foster, in press) was embedded in current thinking and research on leadership (Ackerman, Donaldson & van der Bogert 1996; Heifetz, 1994; Lambert et al., 1995; Lieberman, 1995; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1995; Starratt, 1996; Wilson & Corcoran, 1988). Furthermore, it is premised on the assumptions that leadership within exemplary secondary schools occurs throughout the organization, and does not emanate solely from a formal position of authority in the social structure (Heifetz, 1994; Lambert et al., 1995; Wilson & Corcoran, 1988). A conceptualization of school leadership which transcends individuals, roles, and behaviors, which is focused on bringing parents, teachers, administrators and students together, and which links group problem-solving to learning, underscores the prevalent belief that collaborative leadership modes have the potential to promote school improvement (Leithwood & Steinbach, 1995, p. 222), while supporting the development of school organization which is "community-like." The operational definition of leadership used in this study has been adapted from Lambert's (1995, p. 29) constructivist conception: "leadership comprises the enabling activities that occur in the context of trusting relationships between and among students and educators in school communities focused on learning and achievement" (Foster, in press).

Purpose Of The Study

In order to investigate how the people within two exemplary secondary schools (Gaskell, 1995) experienced and understood leadership, I adopted a collective case study approach (Stake, 1995). The general research question which guided the inquiry was: How do the staff, parents, and students within two exemplary secondary school communities (Gaskell, 1995) experience and understand leadership? A secondary purpose of the study was to investigate how leadership and culture were intertwined in the selected schools.
The specific research questions guiding this investigation were:

1. How do the staff, administrators, parents, and students within selected exemplary secondary schools perceive the formal organizational structures of the school community?
2. How do the staff, administrators, parents, and students within selected exemplary secondary schools perceive the school culture?
3. How do the staff, administrators, parents, and students perceive and experience "routine" (i.e., day-to-day) activities within the school community?
4. How do the staff, administrators, parents, and students perceive and experience "non-routine" occurrences (i.e., issues and innovations) within the school community?

Underpinning and guiding the study were constructivist assumptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) which have important implications regarding the way in which the inquiry was conducted, as well as for the interpretation of the findings. Guba and Lincoln (1994) explained that the final aim of any constructivist research study is "to distill a consensus construction that is more informed and sophisticated than any of the predecessor constructions (including, of course, the etic construction of the investigator)" (p. 111). By focusing on leadership as it is experienced by those within selected exemplary secondary schools, my aim through this investigation was to provide an original perspective on the leadership phenomenon.

Methods And Data Sources

The School Site

The two secondary schools which were investigated in my study were selected from the 21 schools included in the Canadian Education Association's *Exemplary Secondary School Project* (Gaskell, 1995). After analyzing the 21 individual case study reports produced by Gaskell's research team, I selected two school sites which showed evidence of being "community-like," and to which I could gain entry. Each of the principals had been in their positions within the schools for more than five years, and each had participated in the Gaskell study. As this collective case study (Stake, 1995) is on-going, only the case which has been completed will be discussed within the context of this paper.

The school that served as the focus of my first case study was located in a small rural center and housed 350 students from grade one through grade 12. There were 115 academic and non-academic high school students in grades 10 to 12. Eleven teaching staff delivered the full range of academic and non-academic core courses; some courses were scheduled over one half the year while others were scheduled over the full year. Complementary courses available to students included options in physical education, career and technology studies, and the fine arts. Innovative timetabling and individualized programming allowed for a diverse selection and flexible program delivery for students.

The principal had been in his present position for 11 years, and had taught academic courses part-time for the full period. Eight of the eleven secondary school teachers had worked in the school for at least five years, and nine of the eleven taught junior high (grades 7 through 9) as well as high school courses.

Procedures And Data Collection

Data were gathered from multiple sources over a six month period from September to March, and included regular observations of classroom, hallway, and extra-curricular activities, as well as staff, parent, and student meetings. Handwritten field notes were taken directly following the observations and were supplemented in most cases by audiocassette recordings made during the one hour drive to and from the school site.

As the aim of my study was to understand the experience of leadership from the perspectives of the staff, administrators, students, and parents, the largest source of data came from the semi-structured interviews. A total of 19 participants were interviewed on two separate occasions. The principal, seven of the eleven teaching staff, and two support staff members were invited to participate based on their availability and willingness to become involved. Two grade 10 students, two grade 11 students and four grade 12 students were selected based on my observations of each in the classroom and extra-curricular settings. These students, in my mind, represented the student population and would provide a diversity of perspectives. Two parents were also interviewed and were selected because they each had three children in different grades within the school. It was assumed that they would also have a broad perspective of the school. Although the questions varied during the initial interview, participants were encouraged to talk about the school organization, culture, activities, and issues from their point of view. Interviews were as long as two hours and as short as 30 minutes with the average length being 45 minutes. I chose to transcribe all of the tape-recorded interviews for two reasons; I wished to become as familiar as possible with the data and each participant, and I wished to be able to return the transcription of the first interview as quickly as possible to each participant before conducting the second interview. After each participant had an opportunity to review the typewritten transcription from the first interview, a second interview was conducted. It was directed by questions which I had constructed following the first interview, and by questions which the participant wished to discuss. The second interview was not tape-recorded, and lasted on average 20 minutes. Handwritten notes were made directly following this second contact, describing the content and context of each conversation. School documents including newsletters, timetable, attitudinal survey, and yearbook were collected over the six month period.

Data Analysis

As I am conducting a collective case study, the research design specified analyzing each case in terms "of the particular" (Stake, 1995). Comparisons between the two cases within the final dissertation will not be made in a systematic fashion, but rather as they naturally emerge from the data collection, data analysis, and the writing of the case study report. Comparisons between the two cases will be undertaken with the purpose of developing assertions or generalizations about the particular case, and not for the purpose of generalizing about the population of cases within the study, or the leadership phenomenon (Stake, 1995).

For the case study report which has been completed, data from typewritten interview transcriptions, observational field notes, and school documents were analyzed both during the data collection stage and after all the data had been collected. Textual content analysis was used drawing on conventional hermeneutical techniques (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). A constant comparison among data and data sources was undertaken as texts were coded according to categories, and as themes were constructed. Although analysis allowing for coding occurred during the data collection phase, the construction of themes occurred after data collection was completed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 154). I wish to alert the reader to the fact that throughout the course of data analysis, I was guided by Lambert et al.'s (1995) definition of school leadership. I focused on how the perspectives of my participants fit with the conceptualization of school leadership previously described (Foster, in press).

Trustworthiness

In order to enhance trustworthiness of the research, several strategies were adopted. Stake (1995) referred to the importance of methodological triangulation, and data source triangulation as means to enhance credibility of qualitative research. I attempted "to increase credence in the interpretation, to demonstrate commonalty of an assertion" (p. 112) by using multiple data sources and data collection strategies, by incorporating a diversity of perspectives and observers within the secondary school site selected for this study, by collecting data over a period of six months, and by consulting with my supervisor weekly during the data collection, analysis and writing of the case report.

Member checks (Guba and Lincoln, 1985, p. 314) were also conducted throughout the data collection, analysis and writing of the case study report. Typewritten transcriptions from initial interviews were returned to respondents for editing and approval before analyzed as data. As categories and themes were constructed from the data analysis, member checks were on-going. Member checks were also conducted during the drafting and writing of the final case report. The "inquiry audit" (Guba & Lincoln, 1985) was also

used as a technique to establish dependability and confirmability. An audit was conducted as part of this study, and records of activities, decisions, and concerns which occurred during all phases of the study were kept in order to facilitate that audit. During the data collection and analysis stages of the study, I met regularly with my advisor to review decisions made and questions that had arisen. A record of these meetings has been kept. The "audit trail," which is "the residue of records stemming from the inquiry" (p. 319) will allow for the on-going and final audit of my research study when it has been completed, and will be the major technique used for enhancing confirmability.

Stake provided an in-depth examination of the issue of transferability whereby he contended that findings from the case study are different than knowledge from other research traditions because they are more concrete and resonant with the experience of the reader of the study, because they are more contextual, because they are more developed by reader interpretation, and because they are based more on reference populations determined by the reader (Stake, 1981, pp. 35-36, cited in Merriam, 1988, pp. 14-15).

Findings

As my doctoral research and writing is on-going, the findings and conclusions must be read with the understanding that this is a work still in progress. From the data collected and analyzed over the time spent in the first of two schools included in my study, the following categories and themes which characterize the context of the activities comprising leadership within this school were constructed: respectful and supportive relationships between and among staff and students, orientation to innovation and change, student freedom and agency, measuring success, and tensions within the school community.

Respectful And Supportive Relationships

Through my conversations and interviews with students and staff members, it became apparent that people within this secondary school valued the open and trusting relationships. All 19 individuals who participated in the interviews stated that the respectful relationships they had with other students and staff members constituted the single most important aspect of school for them. The feeling of being part of this school community provided the framework in which individuals, students and staff members, felt enabled to explore their individual goals.

Students and teachers repeatedly described interactions which were reciprocal, and which evolved within a context of mutual respect and a sincere appreciation of one another's individuality. "Once they get to know you well enough they know exactly how to treat you and what will move you to want to learn," said one grade 12 student rather thoughtfully after sitting for a few minutes reflecting on the question. "They're more like equals than teachers. They care about our ideas and not just what's in the book," added

another. When I asked students to describe their teachers, there were no one word answers. The list of descriptors included "guide," "coach," and "counselor," but not "mother," or "father." Although comparisons to such family members as "aunts or uncles" were made by some, no student seemed to view their teachers in the same way that they did their "parents." On most occasions when asked to describe their teachers, students hesitated as they searched for ways to aptly portray the unique relationships that seemed to be complex, layered, and constantly evolving. In the minds of these students the teachers were all "different," and were not simply official school personnel. "I think Mr. Hamilton was probably like me when he was growing up," one admiring student stated of his English teacher. "He makes it easy to learn." Humor seemed to be an important part of the human interactions both inside and outside of the classrooms. "Mr. Smith likes to tell us about his cows. They're his pets," giggled a group of grade 11 students. "Somehow he finds a way to use them as examples for everything we're learning in biology class." There were no role descriptions or written procedures separating students from teachers. The only rule in the school, I heard over and over again from staff, students and parents, was "mutual respect."

In classrooms, teachers used a variety of methods to challenge, guide, and nudge each student forward. There was no one lesson plan directing these classes where teacher and students worked in consort toward the common goal of individual achievement. "Teachers never make you feel stupid," said a grade 10 student who was new to the school. His decision to come to this school had been influenced by the positive comments that he had heard about the teachers. "The teachers here will answer the same question over and over until you get it. They tell you to keep asking questions until you get it." His remark underscored the essence of teaching and learning at this school. In this environment of respectful and trusting relationships, students appeared to be confident to take risks, ask their questions, and pursue personal achievement goals.

One of the teachers interviewed was in his first year at the school, but not his first year of teaching. He too had heard about the positive reputation of the school before he arrived. Although he initially felt intimidated by what he thought the expectations might be at "super school" as he called it, he was relieved once he was welcomed into what he termed "the comfortable and laid back atmosphere of the school." This teacher believed that the expectations were high for both students and teachers. As I listened to him talk I was reminded of the conversation that I had had with other teachers that I had interviewed; "You don't feel pressured into doing things, " he explained, "you feel like you 'want' to do well, for the students and for yourself." Another teacher made the following comments about the close relationships between teachers and students. "There is no feeling of us and

them, or us against the kids that I have sometimes felt in other schools. Here it's more like, 'we're all in it together,' students and staff." It was within the context of relationships with no imposed boundaries then, that both adults and students made their connections to school.

Orientation To Innovation And Change

Staff members worked in collaboration with colleagues and students to guarantee that learning and achievement remained the primary focus within the school. This focus was shaped by the belief that students had their own unique gifts and talents. The inclusive and innovative programming, as a result, was continuously evolving in rhythm with the changes in student population and provincial curricula. One of the teachers who had come from a neighboring high school five years before commented on the effect of continuous change; "I was used to this other system, where the system exists and the people have to find ways to fit in. Here it is more like an amoeba that floats around and continually changes depending on whatever the need seems to be." During another conversation about the continuous change going on in the school, the school librarian shared an interesting speculation; "Maybe it is because things are always changing that everyone has so much energy and no one ever gets tired." The belief that change was a solution and not a problem was espoused by administrators, teachers, parents, and students. It was a belief that appeared to have developed over time.

Nine years before when there had been a school evaluation, staff became aware of the need for change. Dropping enrollments and greater course selection at the composite high schools in the nearby cities were drawing students away. The threat of school closure prompted administrators and staff to consider alternatives in the way in which core subjects were offered and delivered. With Mathematics being offered over the full year within the semestered high school, for example, students who were stronger in that subject area had the opportunity of accelerating and completing the grade 12 level early. These students appreciated the continuity they experienced by remaining with the same peers and teacher for the year. "We learn better. It's easy," commented one student from the grade 10 class who was completing the first level course and going on to grade 11 Mathematics in semester two. The grade 10 science program also provided for individual differences. Smaller classes that were timetabled over the full year allowed students to achieve at their level while remaining with their peers. By the end of the year, some students completed the advanced science credit, while others who found learning the sciences more difficult, received the first of two credit requirements for their high school graduation diploma.

Within the framework of an inclusive timetable and innovative secondary school program, there were "spaces" where students were free to make choices and explore their unique gifts and talents; as one teacher stated, it was "up to students to make it work."

Student Freedom And Agency

As students were setting and attaining their personal goals at school, they were also learning appropriate ways in which to exercise their freedom. They were learning to recognize their own strengths and limitations within this school community bounded only by their respectful and trusting relationships with peers and staff. "You can be who you want to be. We have an incredible amount of freedom here." one grade 11 student told me, as though she were stating the obvious. She smiled encouragingly when she saw that I had not completely understood her explanation. "We're not really competitive with one another. The only pressure you feel, is the pressure to beat yourself. " Most students found the expectations reasonable, and accepted the responsibilities that accompanied what students referred to as their "incredible amount of freedom." Attendance did not appear to be an issue for either the staff or students. One student elaborated, "There is an understanding. If you miss something because you are skipping, then it's your own fault. You won't be able to do as well in the course." Students also appeared to take ownership for getting homework done and for keeping up in their school work. The coach of the successful volleyball teams commented about the maturity and sense of responsibility of the students who played sports. "They all seem to be able to get themselves organized to get their work done before the practices and games," he said. "They are very focused young people."

Measuring Success

My reasons for selecting this school for my doctoral study were based partly on its reputation for success among students, staff, parents, and community members. Although two students and one staff member referred to the school's participation in the Canadian Education Association's *Exemplary School Project* (Gaskell, 1995), it became evident through our conversations that inclusion in this national study was an extraneous measure of success. At the end of the previous year, the school district had conducted attitudinal surveys for the first time in response to the government's call for increased accountability. Parent, student, and support staff had participated. Perceptual data pointed to the widespread belief that the school was providing an exceptional secondary education for young people. People were happy and believed that their school was successful. The results were affirming for staff, students, and parents. Students on average performed consistently well on the grade 12 government examinations. On the wall adjacent to the front entry of the school were three framed Canada Scholarship Awards commemorating

the academic accomplishments of former students. Although the school community recognized the success of individuals that had done well, achievement on standardized examinations did not become the focal point of instruction; teachers did not "teach to the test." The academic English teacher explained how test results were treated within the school;

> In the school where I was before, we would go through the results of the tests. They were considered to be reflective of our teaching. Here, I have never had that feeling. The results come in, the principal gives them to the teachers and says, "You're doing a great job." If I were to judge my teaching on these results, I would ask myself, "how can I do better?"

Attitudinal surveys, results on government examinations, and inclusion in the national study of exemplary secondary schools however, were external measurements of success that told only part of the story in the opinion of those whom I interviewed. Those students and staff members who were interviewed tended to view "success" as an intrinsic quality defined and measured in ways which revolved around their own individual learning and achievement. "In the learning process, control doesn't have to be there. Kids just have to have encouragement," claimed Jason rather insightfully. "It's different here than in other schools. Teachers don't force you to learn. They make you want to learn. They really make you want to learn." The grade 12 student repeated the last phrase to make sure that I had understood the importance of his statement. "That's why so many kids do so well here." Parental perceptions of success were similar in that they also were focused on individual student achievement and well-being. One parent alluded to what she believed was the measure of the school's success; "My kids are happy. There is always someone to help them solve their problems. The teachers are terrific and the peers are supportive."

Success was centred on individuals first, but there was also pride in community which seemed to be a source of affirmation of the relationships which provided the context for the affirmation and renewal of relationships which supported individual learning and achievement of personal goals. The extra-curricular sports program, for example, brought peers, staff, parents, and community members together in all seasons to watch and cheer on the school teams. With over 80% of the high school student body participating in the sports program, there was a sense of "common purpose" at these competitive events. Through the telling and retelling of every detail of the "win" or the "loss," there seemed to develop a sense of renewal, which subsequently propelled this school community forward toward its next challenge.

Tensions Within The School Community

The tensions which occasionally occurred because of individual differences that could not be accommodated within the school, sometimes led to the temporary or permanent withdrawal of people. Belonging, being accepted, and making a contribution seemed critical to students' need to achieve and feel successful. The "worst that could happen ," explained one grade 12 student, was to be withdrawn from the school community, or watch others be withdrawn. During the third week that I was in this school, two young men were asked to withdraw after a list of misdemeanors. A classmate who had been their friend made the statement; "I am sorry that they got kicked out of school, but they can't treat people or property like that." I had been surprised to learn that this rural high school encountered social challenges similar to the ones found in the larger urban and suburban high schools. It had the same human complexities as other inclusive community. Several students were not living at home and others were on probation because of minor legal infractions. These students looked to the school to provide social and emotional support that was apparently lacking in their lives. This situation occasionally caused tension, as these students learned to focus on their academic as well as personal needs while at school.

Several government-mandated reforms were being implemented at the school level, including Site-Based Management. Over the past several years, the administrators had adopted a business approach in the way that the school was run and operated. Efficiency in their school administrative model had come to mean "the manner in which individuals' needs were satisfied." Students within what these two administrators called their business model were "clients" of the school and not the "products" of the larger public school system. The "public" in their education model referred to the parents, students and community whom they served. Although the two administrators within this school were confident that they would, with time, make the necessary adjustments required as their district moved to Site-Based Management, they had some concerns which included publishing student results from the grade 12 government examinations. There was a growing belief that publishing student test results could be harmful if students, parents, and the staff felt compelled to start making comparisons. There was a sense that some focus on individual achievement and success might be lost if this occurred. With the government's growing emphasis on efficiency and fiscal accountability, there was also some concern that smaller schools in neighboring rural communities might be threatened with school closures if schools were compared. The impact of closing community schools was explained by a staff member in the following way; "It's something like keeping the local store open," he explained. "You don't see the value until it's gone, and then you see. It's more far-reaching than you first think, and then first appears."

The moments of tension and dissonance within this school community were reminders of the complexity and unpredictability of the larger environment of which the school was a part. The tensions and moments of dissonance caused by individual differences and government mandated changes seemed to fuel the human energy within the school in unique ways, creating further possibilities for learning, achievement and success.

Conclusions

The findings from this case study of leadership within a selected secondary school with the reputation for success, have emphasized a conceptualization of the leadership phenomenon which transcends individuals, roles and behaviors (Lambert et al., 1995, p. 29), and which implies that "anyone in the educational community--teachers, administrators, parents, students--can engage in leadership actions" (p. 29). Leadership in this case study has been presented as the enabling activities that occur within the context of trusting relationships between and among students and staff members who are focused on individual learning, achievement, and success (Foster, in press).

Given the emphasis that is currently being placed on quality and accountability in public education, coupled with the belief that existent secondary school organization and structures are not adequate frameworks in which to bring about needed reform, it is the moment to consider new perspectives on school leadership that are linked to school effectiveness. The intent of my on-going doctoral study has been to provide such a perspective by investigating leadership within selected secondary schools that have the reputation for success. By constructing thick description of the leadership phenomena in each particular case, I am attempting to provide "the data base that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers" (Stake, 1981, p. 36, cited in Merriam, 1988, p. 15).

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